

Additional Needs Overseas © AFF Families Journal

G1 Branch of UKSC(G) explains the limitations on additional needs provision overseas

If you have a disabled family member, or a child with additional educational needs, have you thought about how the Army would provide the support they need if you were posted overseas? What if your child needs one-to-one teaching, or has a condition that requires specialist medical treatment or specialised equipment or facilities at school or at home? Can the Army provide these things overseas?

In the UK, support for disabled dependants, or those with additional needs, is a local authority responsibility. In overseas commands, such as British Forces Germany, the Army has to provide that support. Where it is practical to do so, under its holistic Additional Needs policy the Army tries to provide a standard of support and facilities similar to those available and accessible in the UK. However, this is limited by resources, and more acute or unusual additional needs cases may be beyond the support capability of the overseas Command.

Support limitations

In most cases, these limitations apply to children with more complex disabilities. A disabled child's social, educational and medical support needs become more individual and complex as they grow older. In general terms, it is easier to accommodate younger disabled children within existing mainstream educational settings than their older counterparts, whose particular patterns of need may vary markedly from their contemporaries. Such children may need dedicated support, which may be difficult for the Army to sustain in overseas Commands. Similarly, age is an important factor when considering provision of specialised facilities and equipment.

There are no hard and fast rules and overseas Commands are required to carry out a professional assessment to determine whether a dependant's additional needs can be met. Each individual is unique and is assessed in his or her own right, whether the need is educational, medical, physical or social, or a combination of all four. Such an assessment might need access to confidential medical or educational records, or to discuss the case with consultants or teachers. Parents would be expected to grant permission for such access, as without it the assessors will not be able to gain a true understanding of the dependant's needs.

Tell the Army!

All Service personnel with disabled or additional needs dependants should be aware of Army General Administrative Instruction No 108 (AGAI 108). This is the Army's instruction on Disabled and Additional Needs dependants and it can help the Army to help you. Your soldier should tell his/her Manning Branch if a member of your family has additional needs, so that they can be sure you will get the support you need where you are posted.

The Army is obliged to minimise the disadvantages to personnel who have disabled or additional needs dependants, and no soldier in this situation should be discriminated against, nor their career adversely affected. Their careers will be managed with care and compassion and every practical assistance will be given. However, postings to overseas Commands must be carefully considered and discussed with all relevant parties before an informed decision is made.

The Army has to be able to determine the need for support in each individual case, and the number of professionals required to give that support. If you don't tell the Army

about the additional needs of your family, it means the Army can't predict or judge these requirements.

In the worst case, if a soldier reports for duty at an overseas Command without telling the Army about an additional needs dependant, the family can be returned to the UK if support cannot be provided. It is not hard to understand the distress this would cause, especially if the soldier has to continue with the posting. But the stark reality is that it does happen!

Don't wait until you get a Posting Order - seek advice! Act now! And make sure your Postings Branch is aware of any additional needs in your family.

Have you been refused a posting?

AFF Germany says there may be more you can do

So, you have declared that you have a dependant with additional needs, done the necessary paperwork and sent it off all in good time, only to find out that your posting to Germany has been cancelled on the basis that your dependant's additional needs cannot be met in that location.

What does this mean? Well, on the basis of the information that you supplied, the relevant professionals will have looked at the services and facilities available, taking into consideration the need to return to the UK for specialist treatment or assessments. A decision will then have to be made as to whether the dependant with additional needs would be disadvantaged by an overseas posting. If the answer is yes, then it is almost certain that the posting would be cancelled.

Is there anything else you can do? After all, no-one wants to put someone with additional needs at a disadvantage. But what if the information that you originally gave was not specific enough? What if you just wrote down a diagnosis and did not describe the level of disability or more importantly the level of independence and ability of the person concerned?

If you feel that this is the case then there is something that you can do. You have the right to re-submit your case with additional information to support your individual situation and request for it to be reconsidered. You should submit your information to the relevant authority that cancelled your posting - remember to keep a copy of anything that you send!

It is also worthwhile keeping your Unit Welfare Officer updated on your situation. If you are posted to Germany then the liaison between your outgoing and receiving UWOs is going to be vital in ensuring a smooth transition.

Where to find out more

If you are considering a posting overseas and have an additional needs dependant, you and your soldier should talk to the Unit Welfare Officer, Regimental Careers Management Officer or Regimental Administrative Officer. You can also contact:

- Childrens Education Advisory Service (CEAS): disabled children or those with additional educational needs should be registered with CEAS, who can provide advice on education and schooling overseas. Contact: CEAS, Trenchard Lines, Upavon, Pewsey, Wiltshire SN9 6BE or by email at enquiries@ceas.detsa.co.uk. Helpline: 01980 618244 (Mil 94344 8244)
- SSAFA Forces Help Additional Needs and Disabilities Advisor: Heidi Dudley on 020 7463 9234 or email: heidi.d@ssafa.org.uk
- Army Welfare Service: The AWS can be found in all UK and British Forces Germany Garrisons and is able to provide advice and assistance. Contact your local AWS representative or telephone 01722 436565.
- Personnel Welfare Service: The PWS is located in Northern Ireland and Cyprus. Contact your local PWS representative or telephone: Northern Ireland 028 92 29491; Cyprus (local) 25 96 2009 (Episkopi Mil 2009)